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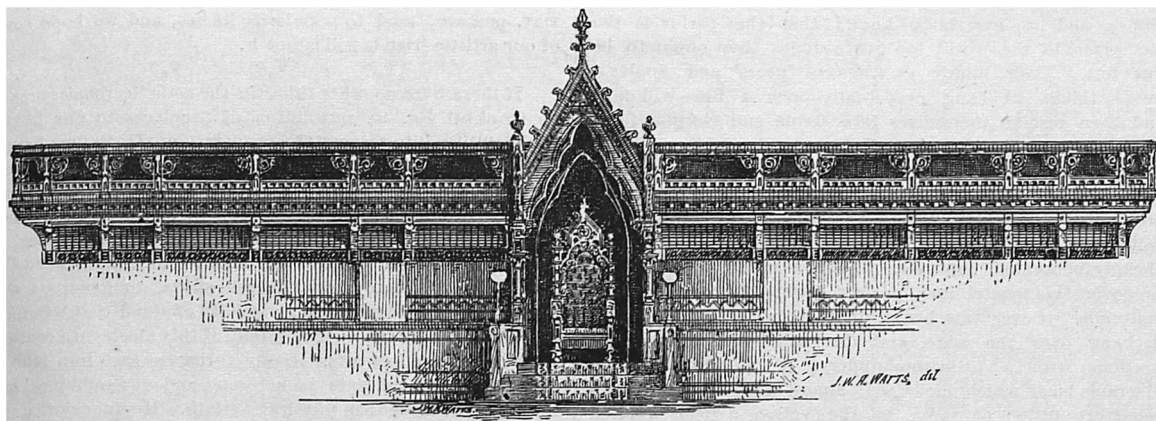
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SPEAKER'S THRONE AND REPORTERS' GALLERY, HOUSE OF COMMONS, OTTAWA. DRAWN BY JNO. W. H. WATTS.

DECORATIVE ART IN LONDON.

BY HENRY B. WHEATLEY.

EVERYBODY who is anybody has left London, and the unfortunate inhabitants who still remain are in a minority in their own city, being outnumbered by the visitors, who swarm in the streets. There is positively nothing doing, and those who like the ancient Athenians go about asking for some new thing will find little to reward their search. Audiences can scarcely be obtained in town, but some of those who are taking their holidays like to appear busy, and the meetings of the peripatetic societies give them occupation. The Royal Archæological Institute has just met in Sussex, and the British Archæological Association in Kent. The Castle of Lewes was described by Mr. G. J. Clarke, and the Priory by Mr. E. A. Freeman. The members of the Institute also had the rich treat of listening to Mr. Freeman at Battle Abbey on the theme which he has so thoroughly made his own. One thousand five hundred people visited the place in batches of fifty at a time. The Association met at Dover, and an extra day was arranged for a visit to Calais, so long a dependency of the English crown. Besides these two national institutions most of the local archæological societies have had their "outings" in different parts of the country. The members of the Middlesex Society spent a pleasant day in August in the neighborhood of Harrow and Pinner. One of the places visited was the famous church of Little Stanmore, known to all students of English literature as the chapel of the magnificent Duke of Chandos's superb palace of Canons. It is a most interesting relic of a long past fashion of decoration, and remains as it was when Laguerre and Grinling Gibbons left it. The organ is seen through an opening at the back of the altar, where Handel played and composed for several years. When Pope was in a spiteful fit he was quite regardless of the truth of what he wrote, and he was as unjust when he described the ceiling:

Where sprawl the Saints of Verrio or Laguerre,
Or gilded clouds in fair expansion lie,
And bring all paradise before your eye."

As when he alluded to the strains of Handel:

Light quirks of music, broken and uneven
Make the soul dance upon a jig to Heaven.

Figure painting on a ceiling is unsuited to a our modern taste, but still it is not altogether to be condemned, and these are excellent examples of the style. In this "restoring" age it is peculiarly pleasant to see a church kept in proper repair, and at the same time exactly as it was in days of its greatest fame.

It is well that some of us should have time to watch and draw public attention to the destruction of public monuments which is going on so rapidly in all directions. In India fine examples of native architecture are constantly being destroyed, and it is therefore good news that Major Cole (a son of the late Sir Henry Cole) has been appointed Curator of Ancient Monuments in India. Major Cole reports that to prepare for a ball given in honor of the Prince of Wales the molded fret-work of the wooden ceiling in the centre of the Diwan-i-Khas was repainted in black and gold and red, instead of white and gold the original colors, and the central rose was converted into a sort of "starved star-fish." This, however, is as nothing compared with the bad news still to be referred to: "The great pillared Diwan-i-Am at Delhi, with its fine marble mosaic canopy and throne is used as a canteen; and on the right of the throne is a bar for serving out liquor! To the left of the throne is an enclosure of bamboo screen-work, in which Nubbi Bux keeps a soldiers coffee shop. Above and at the back of the throne is a small open apartment the walls of which are faced with the celebrated black marble mosaic work; but this as well as the

inlaid patterns on the throne, has been villainously repaired in colored plaster."

Mr. Ruskin's voice has been heard much of late and it is always refreshing to listen to his words even when we do not agree with the views put forward. His last utterance is on art in towns, and appears as a preface to a pamphlet by T. J. Horsfall, of Manchester. Professor Ruskin lays special stress upon two points, viz., that "faith cannot dwell in hideous towns," and that "familiarity with beauty is a most powerful aid to belief." As to the first he will not let us off if we say that our town is handsome for he affirms—"that the fine streets of most modern towns are more hideous than the back ones," and with regard to the second he says, "the infidel temper which is incapable of perceiving spiritual beauty, has an instant and constant tendency to delight in the reverse of it, so that practically its investigation is always, by preference of forms of death or disease."

Mr. T. Armstrong, the Director for Art at South Kensington, has lately drawn a comparison between the English and foreign systems of Art Teaching, and the conclusion he comes to is that the main scheme or system of art education in this country cannot be changed with advantage. At the same time he points out the benefit which the foreigner gains by living in an atmosphere of art, as this cannot be said for the Englishman.

Instances of the marked tendency of the present day towards the enlargement of large business, and the extinction of small ones multiply daily. Messrs. Jackson and Graham's business has been turned into a limited company with a capital of £160,000 in £10 shares. The estate of the firm was sold some months ago by the trustee to Mr. J. Bell for £90,000. The Army and Navy House Furnishing Company has been started to take up the business which the directors of the Junior Army and Navy Stores could not avail themselves of in consequence of the necessity in this case of a system of credit.

I mentioned in a former letter the attempted sale of Florence Walpole's house at Strawberry Hill. Now the furniture collected by the late Countess Waldegrave has been sold, and although some large prices were realized most of the lots were knocked down at very reasonable sums. From the time Lady Waldegrave came into possession of the house until shortly before her death she was constantly on the look out for objects which had formed part of the original Strawberry Hill collection, and she was fairly successful in her search. Now these again have been dispersed. The sale of the furniture of the Princess Mary, Duchess of Teck, and the Duke of Teck removed from Kensington Palace took place at the Riding School, Knightsbridge, and the total amount realized was £2,300. The auctioneer contradicted some of the rumors that had been floating about, and said that the Duke and Duchess were removing to White Lodge, Richmond, which was much too small to hold all their furniture, hence the sale.

Strenuous endeavors are being made to finish off the new Courts of Justice, and during the recess several improvements will be carried out in the interior to obviate the evils which have been complained of. Another great architectural competition is now in the air, and it is announced that the government is about to invite designs for the War Office and Admiralty. It is proposed to erect these at Spring Gardens, and not in Parliament Street, which has hitherto been considered the most appropriate position. Parliament Street is to be widened, and buildings for banks, clubs, insurance offices, etc., are to be erected there in place of government offices. I suppose it is inevitable, but it is impossible not to regret the gradual clearing away of all that makes London historically interesting. This is more particularly the case in the city, where nothing old is left, but the demolitions in the West End are also very extensive. Some decorations at the Peel Park Museum, Manchester, have lately been carried out with

great care and success. The object aimed at was to decorate the galleries with ornaments appropriate to the contents of the cases exhibited in them. Thus plants of all kinds from restorations of those in the coal beds of Lancashire to representations of living fruits and flowers, are shown on the walls and ceilings. In all there are sixty botanical drawings taken from authentic sources in the Reference Library. The walls intended for the display of pictures are painted of a rich Indian red color and those of the corridor are of rich old-gold color which throws up the busts and other statuary with great effect.

The recent improvement of the roadway at Hyde Park corner necessitated the lowering of the famous Wellington Statue which has stood on the Arch opposite Apsley House for forty years, and no place being found suitable for its re-erection the First Commissioner of Works has decided to melt it down. The finger of scorn has been pointed at this statue ever since it was first cast, and the majority will probably be glad that it is to be destroyed, but I confess I am sorry, for it has a history, and the great Duke himself was pleased with it. Some say the horse is ugly and so it may be but the celebrated 'Copenhagen,' from which it was modeled, was not beautiful. Public opinion is being brought to bear upon the Government for the removal of the Wellington Monument in St. Paul's Cathedral from its present absurd position to the place for which it was designed. This is the grandest piece of work that an Englishman has produced for many years, and it is placed where it cannot be seen without cricking your neck, and where it remains incomplete for want of the equestrian figure which Stevens intended to set on the summit.

The use of terra cotta as a building material is becoming very general in London, and it is found to possess many advantages as a smoke resister. The Natural History Museum at South Kensington still looks bright and fresh, and Mr. Waterhouse is now using a dark red terra cotta with good effect in the new building for the Central Technical Institution in Exhibition Road. Messrs. Stiff & Co. of Lambeth have a commission from the Government of India for four groups of statuary in terra cotta, and the first of "Agriculture" is just finished. The figures are said to be imperishable from having been fired to a great degree of hardness. Mr. John Wilson of the Trafalgar Studios, Chelsea, whose very powerful pieces of wood carving have attracted the attention of some of our first artists has produced a very fine allegorical panel in terra cotta for the new Princess Alice Memorial Hospital at Eastbourne. The panel is 9 feet by 3 feet, and is placed over the entrance door. The design is well conceived and carried out with considerable boldness of effect, the details being shown up in a very sharp and brilliant manner which does the greatest credit to the artist.

A rather important piece of ivory carving has just been produced by Mr. R. J. Johnson. It is a pastoral staff for Dr. Wilberforce, Bishop of Newcastle, and is made in four pieces joined by sockets of silver gilt repousse work with screws, the total length being 6 feet 3 inches. The revival of the use of croziers and pastoral staffs has been condemned by some, and Sir Edmund Beckett has made great fun of them in *The Times*, but we have nothing to do with this point of view. It is always gratifying to find objects coming into favor which give scope for the work of the artist in minute detail. A most curious instance of the vicissitudes of certain works of art has been reported in the papers. A suit of armor said to have belonged to Francis I of France was bought by the late Sir Anthony Rothschild for £100. He sold it for £1000 to the late Earl of Ashburnham, who sold it to a dealer for £4000, who sold it for £17,000. This increase of price is sufficiently remarkable, but there is more to be told. The suit was deposited in the Pantechnicon, and when that building was destroyed by fire it was buried in the ruins. When found it was sold for a few pounds, as little more than old iron. The purchaser however knew its value, and after entirely renovating the old suit, sold it to Mr. Spitzer of Paris for £12,000. This gentleman has it now for sale at £20,000.

With this anecdote I must bring my letter to a conclusion, and I hope next month I shall be able to chronicle some signs of revived life among the followers of decorative art.

In a small room where ground space is valuable it is a good plan to have a long book-case to contain two rows of books. It should be fixed on the wall about the level of the eye, and supported by brackets. A molding or gallery round the top, and a few bits of china will make it quite decorative.